

NATIONAL WOMEN'S COUNCIL OF IRELAND

PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION 2009



National Women's
Council of Ireland
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na mBan in Éirinn

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Having been involved in catch up for a number of years Ireland is now in the forefront of successful world economies¹. The Irish economy is emerging from a period of rapid growth and structural transformation to one where slower, yet steady progress is forecast over the medium term. The most recent ESRI Medium Term Review for the period 2008–2015 states that:

'The economy has the potential to grow at around 3.75% a year over the coming decade, despite significant short-term problems. When the current global economic slowdown ends, with appropriate policies the economy should recover quite rapidly. Even if current difficulties prove more severe than anticipated, the economy is resilient and a global recovery would still see it rebound.' (ESRI Medium Term Review 2008-2015, No.11, 2008.)

Returning to a period of growth, albeit slower than in the recent past, requires us to retain our commitment to a high skilled economy with strong regulatory and social support systems. A successful economy is one that combines steady growth and on going competitiveness with a distributional system that reinforces social solidarity and strives for a good and improving quality of life for all its citizens - women, men and children. In a period of economic slow down therefore it is important to ensure that budgetary policy supports this important balance between social and economic development.

The recent NESC report on 'The Irish Economy in the Early 21st Century' while recognising the current difficult context, calls on the government and the social partners to continue to work towards a shared understanding of the key factors that underpin our economy and society. They call for clarity on the following areas:

- ◆ the need to continue to invest in physical infrastructure, education, research, training, health and social services;
- ◆ the need to recognise that recent increases in social welfare rates are part of a medium term project to build a developmental welfare state;
- ◆ the crucial role of the labour market in economic and social success and to ensure a continued commitment to high quality workplaces and opportunities;
- ◆ the importance of on-going competitiveness across the economy;
- ◆ the need to apply effective monitoring and evaluation systems to areas of human capital and social investment as well as to capital projects; and to maintain commitment to the agreed objectives contained in the ten year social partnership agreement Towards 2016. (NESC, *The Irish Economy in the Early 21st Century*, June 2008)

1 Ireland is now ranked fourth in the world in UN's Human Development Index (HDI) based on strong improvements in income per capita, life expectancy and education levels (Forfas 2007 Annual Competitiveness report).

The NWCI in its pre-budget submission calls on the government to frame the 2009 Budget in a way that supports the on-going positive development of the Irish economy and society in the medium term, while recognising that priorities must be made in the current difficult climate.

In deciding on these priorities it is important to recognise the important role that women have played in both Ireland's economic and social development to date. The employment rate for women in Ireland increased from 46% in 1997 to 60% in 2007 and is now above the EU target for 2010 (CSO, 2007)². This occurred despite the continuation of woefully inadequate childcare supports, lack of flexible work options and the very unequal distribution of care work in Ireland. The result is that many women, despite their significant contribution to recent economic growth, continue to experience disadvantage in the labour market in terms of wage levels, concentration in low paid jobs and access to decision-making. Added to this, women who are dependent on social welfare, migrant women, women with health needs and women experiencing domestic violence are subject to a range of inequalities.

The NWCI therefore calls on the government in Budget 2009 to address the hidden economic costs of gender inequality and to ensure that recent gains are not eroded. This we believe means allocating funds in the coming budget in a way that prioritises programmes that support women to continue and expand their important role in Ireland's prosperity, that supports greater gender equality in the distribution of such prosperity and that works to ensure that women particularly at risk are adequately protected.

The NWCI is prioritising the following areas for Budget 2009

- ◆ Economic Independence and Income Adequacy
- ◆ Health
- ◆ Integration and Anti-Racism
- ◆ Decision Making
- ◆ Childcare
- ◆ Violence Against Women

ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE FOR WOMEN

Recommendations

- ◆ Abolish the Limitation Rule for all Social Welfare Payments.
- ◆ Abolish the 2-year rule so that women have full access to entitlements on entering employment.
- ◆ Abolish the category of "Qualified Adult" within the Social Welfare System. Make all people so categorised independently eligible for Social Welfare payments. Pay those eligible directly.
- ◆ Provide full Social Insurance Credits within the Homemakers Scheme and make these credits retrospective.
- ◆ Introduce a means-tested Full-Time Parental Allowance for all low-income parents of children up to the age of 8 years.
- ◆ Introduce a means-tested Part-Time Parental Allowance for all low-income parents of children aged 8 to 14.

Rationale

Economic independence is a prerequisite for personal well-being and autonomy. It is a crucial element in facilitating participation in society.

The capacity to earn and spend is a core driver in any economy. From a feminist perspective, the "male breadwinner" model of economic distribution results in fundamental inequalities for women throughout their life cycle and denies women their human rights. This model both creates and maintains dependency for women, and consistently makes invisible women's unpaid work.

Unsurprisingly, a recent report, "**Gender Inequalities in Time-Use**", from the Equality Authority states; "...having young children leads to a much greater increase in women's unpaid workload than in men's, regardless of the hours of woman's paid work". The sharing of ALL care work between women and men is a prerequisite for the full engagement of men in the private sphere of their own homes and of women in the public sphere of their own society.

Limitation Rule: The Limitation rule applies to claimants of Job Seekers Allowance, whereby the social welfare system restricts the total amount allowable to a second eligible person in a couple to 66% of the Jobseekers Allowance. This rule significantly impacts on women, as over 95% of second claimants in a household are women. Due to this restriction, many women do not register independently for social welfare as there is no financial incentive and they become qualified adults dependant on their male partner for financial support.

Qualified Adults: The vast majority of Qualified Adults are women (95%); this status is assigned to those who are not registered independently and are dependant on their partner for their income. This reinforces female dependency and makes women vulnerable to poverty, violence and exploitation. Enabling women to receive direct entitlement to payments is critical in order for women on low incomes to achieve economic independence.

Retrospective Justice: The NWCI launched its new policy on pensions – '*What Women Want – a model of pensions that guarantees independence*' in May 2008. For Budget 2009 we are calling for retrospective justice for women who have reached pension age and find that the years they have spent in unpaid care work are not recognised

for pension entitlement. These women have either no entitlement to a contributory pension or receive a reduced pension. The designation of women's unpaid care-work years within the **Homemaker's Scheme** as "disregards" is demeaning both for women and for unpaid care work. The NWCI has repeatedly called for reform of the scheme to a system of full PRSI credits thereby creating a positive designation of women's work and a concrete valuing of their contribution to society. The National Women's Strategy (NWS) supports such a change and proposes a "Review (of) the issues and costs associated with a switch to a system of credited contributions and review the backdating of the Homemakers Scheme"³. These "credits" within the Homemaker's Scheme should be provided for up to 20 years, extended to cover maternity benefit and be applied retrospectively to benefit older women, enabling them to have a full, independent contributory pension.

Supporting Parenting: Regardless of family status or household, parents of young children living on low incomes require financial supports for parenting. The introduction of Full-Time and Part-Time Parental Allowance would recognize the parenting needs of all parents and support those needs financially. The Government has proposed to "*Bring forward proposals aimed at supporting lone parents, and other parents on low income, into employment, with a view to ending welfare dependency and achieving a higher standard of living for themselves and their children*"⁴. These proposals should be progressed speedily and all infrastructural supports (childcare, education and training) should be put in place alongside their implementation.

INCOME ADEQUACY⁵

Recommendations

- ◆ Increase Personal Social Welfare Rates by €26.25 from €197.80 to €224.05 (Cost €1,426m) and the One Parent Family Payment by €26.25 (Cost €122m).
- ◆ Increase Child Benefit for the first and second child by €7.30 per month (from €166.00 to €173.30 per month) and by €8.90 for the third and subsequent child (from €203.00 to €211.90 per month). Cost €111m.

³ Objective 6-C, Action 60. Objective 6-B Action 54. NWS 2007-2016, Dept. of Justice Equality & Law Reform, Government Publication, April 18th 2007. (pV)

⁴ NWS 2007-2016, Dept. of Justice Equality & Law Reform, Government Publication, April 18th 2007. (pV)

⁵ Costings of Income Adequacy Recommendations have been provided by the Department of Social and Family Affairs September 2008.

- ◆ Increase all Qualified Child Allowances by €4.00 for the under-12s, from €24.00 per week to €28.00, and by €9.00, for the over-12s, to €33.00 per week. Cost €71m and €40m respectively.
- ◆ Increase the Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) to Asylum Seekers under Direct Provision with an additional allowance of for each dependent Child to Asylum Seekers under Direct Provision by €43.54 from €19.10 per week to €62.64 per week, with an additional allowance of €36.54 for each dependent Child. Cost €15m

Rationale

The **National Women's Strategy** identifies the following groups as particularly vulnerable to poverty: part-time workers, widows, qualified adults, low-income families, lone parents, farm/family business workers, homemakers, pensioners.⁶ Women predominate in all of them. However, in addition, part of the changing economic impact of globalisation means that, in the future, workers in general will be more vulnerable to shifting job markets. This group of "working poor" will typically be part-time, seasonal and atypical workers. Again, in this group, women are exposed to poverty.

In response to these shifting employment markets, the European Commission proposes the creation of employment and social security principles which include *'flexible and reliable contractual arrangements, active labour market policies, comprehensive lifelong learning strategies and modern social protection systems providing adequate income support during periods of unemployment.'*⁷ No mention is made here of the pervasive reality of rearing children and unpaid care work. Ensuring that social welfare payments keep pace with inflation and provide an adequate income is critical for those vulnerable to poverty particularly in times of minimal economic growth. This issue is fundamental for Budget 2009 as it will decide if those on the lowest incomes are to bear the brunt of the current economic recession.

WOMEN'S HEALTH

Recommendations

- ◆ Allocate the necessary resources to ensure the full national rollout of Breast Check, to all areas in 2009.
- ◆ Increase medical card eligibility in line with social welfare payments and lower income levels.
- ◆ Allocate previously committed resources to the implementation of the National Disability Strategy.
- ◆ Allocate previously committed resources to implement the Mental Health Strategy – A Vision for Change.
- ◆ Allocate the necessary resources to implement the Primary Care Strategy.
- ◆ Allocate €1 million for the development of gender proofing and gender mainstreaming strategies in Irish health policy.

Rationale

Cancer Screening: The death rate from cancer among women is higher in Ireland than in any other country in Europe except Denmark. We welcome the introduction of Cervical Check – the National Cervical Screen Programme, which we hope will have a significant impact on the health of many women and in particular, women from poorer areas who are 2.6 times more likely to develop cervical cancer than those from more well off areas⁸. Breast Check however, is still not available to women throughout Ireland despite assurances in 2003 by the then Minister for Health Micheal Martin that it would be by 2005.⁹ Over the past number of years the NWCI have called for the extension of BreastCheck to all parts of the country as a crucial measure in saving the lives of thousands of women. It is essential that this process be completed in 2009.

Medical Cards: Women who live on low incomes experience poorer health throughout their lifetimes and die younger than women with higher incomes¹⁰. In 2005 the EU SILC survey found that in Ireland 30% of people who were at risk of poverty and 16% of those who

experienced consistent poverty did not have a medical card. Given the fact that more women than men experience poverty this situation has a significant bearing on women. Raising the income eligibility threshold for medical cards would have a significant impact on the health and well being of women on low incomes and their families.

Women with Disabilities: The Programme for Government 2007 made a commitment "to ensure that at least half of the strategy (Disability) will be implemented by 2010". At the present rate of progress it is not possible that half of the National Disability Strategy will be implemented by 2010 – and at this time disability organisations are having difficulty establishing what exactly can be achieved by 2010. There is increasing concern amongst disability organisations that funding allocated to disability in the HSE this year may not be delivered and the HSE may seek to take back money from disability to use elsewhere. The NWCI calls on Government to refrain from making people with disabilities bear the brunt of the economic downturn and to meet its existing commitments to disabled people in Ireland as a matter of priority.

Mental Health: The first mental health strategy for decades, A Vision for Change, was launched in January 2005 with the political promise of €25 million per annum to implement it. A Vision for Change proposes significant changes and improvements in mental health services, with a move away from inpatient institutional care and an increased reliance on community services. The policy states that assets acquired from the sale of mental health lands should be reinvested in developing community mental health services. An extra €25 million was to be allocated annually to fund new developments outlined in A Vision for Change. However, just €27 million of the promised €60 million was spent on developing new services in 2006 and 2007, while the remainder was used to "shore up budgetary overspends" by the HSE. The HSE Service Plan for 2008 shows that no additional funds have been allocated in 2008 for the implementation of A Vision for Change¹¹.

Primary Care: Within a week of the publication of the health strategy, a Primary Care Strategy was published in 2001. This detailed a plan for the development of state of the art primary care centres with multidisciplinary teams through out the country. Seven years later, apart from the ten pilot teams set up at the time of the launch, most areas of the country remain without primary care teams. While there has been a renewed interest in primary care since 2005 and there are commitments in **Towards 2016** to have 300 teams in place by the end of 2008, neither Budget 2008 nor the HSE's 2008 National Service Plan contains the required funding to ensure that these teams will be created by the end of 2008. According to the HSE in May 2008, there are 60 teams in place and 90 teams will be up and running by the end of the year, 210 short of commitments made in Towards 2016 and the 2007 Programme for Government. However, according to the Irish Medical Organisation, none of the 60 teams in place are fully functioning i.e. they are short of many of the essential members of primary care teams, they do not work out of the same premises, and the teams are much smaller than originally envisaged.¹²

Women's Health Status: Objective 8 in the National Women's Strategy 2007-2016 commits to "improve the health status of women in Ireland through gender focused policies". Specifically it commits to

- ◆ incorporate a gender dimension into health policy planning at the earliest possible stage of development e.g. cardiovascular strategy,
- ◆ ensure ongoing redevelopment of the health services structures includes representation of women at all decision making levels,
- ◆ update women's health structures in light of recent health reform in collaboration with the HSE and the National Women's Health Council target,
- ◆ put in place health policies and service that allow women full access (e.g. transport, childcare/eldercare privacy)
- ◆ put in place health policies and services to support carers such as respite, counselling, information, financial security).

6 Objective 6-A, B & C. NWS 2007-2016, Dept. of Justice Equality & Law Reform, Government Publication, April 18th 2007. (piii-v) – inserts in italicised quotes, NWCI.

7 http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/emplweb/news/news_en.cfm?id=263 The European Commission, Office for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. Brussels 27-06-2007.

8 National Cancer Registry Ireland and Women's Health Council (2006) Report on Cancer in Ireland. Dublin: Women's Health Council

9 Sara Burke; Unequal in life and Death - Women's Health Gender and Inequality in the Irish Health System; Where are We Now - new feminist perspectives on women in contemporary Ireland, Tasc 2008.

10 J. Barry, H. Sinclair, A. Kelly, R. O'Loughlin, D. Handy and T. O. Dowd.; 2001 Inequalities in Health in Ireland - Hard Facts, Dept. of Community Health and General Practice, Trinity College Dublin.

11 Sara Burke; National Women's Council of Ireland - Health Strategy 2008.

12 *ibid.*

The WHO Gender Policy has stated that ...

*'various initiatives have been undertaken to increase the attention given to women's issues, including in health. These efforts have, however, not proved adequate to redress existing imbalances between women and men. Hence the decision, now being implemented across the UN system, is that a gender approach must be mainstreamed into all policies and programmes. In health, the aim of this approach is to identify and address inequalities in health and health care related to gender roles and power relationships between women and men... This will in turn increase the effectiveness and impact on equity of health interventions and contribute to achieving social justice.'*¹³

The provision of resources to support this process is a critical prerequisite for its successful implementation.

INTEGRATION AND ANTI-RACISM

Recommendations

- ♦ Allocate €10 million to the Fund for Initiatives to Support the Integration of Legally Resident Immigrant and reinstate the fund within Pobal to promote the integration of migrants within Irish society
- ♦ Allocate a specific budget line within the new integration strategy to support the collection of evidence based data on the situation of migrants with a particular emphasis on migrant women.
- ♦ Allocate a specific budget line to promote the integration of Travellers within the new integration infrastructure and within any measure developed to support integration.

Rationale

The **Fund for Initiatives to Support the Integration of Legally Resident Immigrants** was initially designed to support Local Area Based Partnership Companies and local and national NGOs to develop innovative integration initiatives with migrants and the wider population. Over the past number of years the fund (which has been insufficient to meet demand) has been administered by Pobal who have built up a wide range of experience in this area as well as in development work with women through the administration of the Equality for Women Measure. In 2008 the Fund was removed from Pobal and allocated to Local authorities to develop their own integration initiatives. Whilst it is clearly necessary for local authorities to develop such initiatives, funds of this nature should not be removed from community based groups, women's groups or others working from a social inclusion and community development perspective towards the integration of migrants in Irish society.

Whilst a huge range of work has been undertaken with migrant communities by NGOs at local and national levels, there is little funding available to assist such organisations in the collection and analysis of evidenced based data. Such data is essential in terms of policy formation and should be supported and encouraged. 'NonGovernmental Organisations are a valuable resource in this as in so many areas, precisely because they are nongovernmental...their contributions and their insights have been invaluable reflecting their interaction on the ground and on a daily basis with the migrant community'¹⁴ The new migration strategy must allocate the necessary resources to ensure that the lessons and experiences of such NGOs are fed into the development and implementation of all integration policy.

Inclusion of Travellers: Recent years have witnessed the development of a new infrastructure in Ireland to promote integration. These include the establishment of the Office of the Minister for Integration, the publication in 2008 of the new integration strategy 'Migration Nation' and the proposed establishment of a Task Force on Integration, Ministerial Council and a Standing

Commission on Integration. Travellers are one of the largest minority ethnic communities in Ireland who experience high levels of social exclusion, racism, poverty and discrimination. Traveller women live 12 years less than their settled counterparts and infant mortality rates amongst the Traveller community are 3 times that of the settled community. For many years Travellers and Traveller organisations have sought to promote social inclusion and equality for their community. The failure of the current integration system to refer to or take into account the needs of Travellers is a major concern, which should be immediately addressed.

CHILDCARE

Recommendations

- ♦ Reduce childcare costs to parents by a minimum of 50% to all parents and 75% to parents on low incomes through a national subsidisation scheme.
- ♦ Remove plans to introduce Childcare Subvention Scheme for Community Childcare Providers.
- ♦ Introduce 4 weeks paid parental leave.
- ♦ Introduce 3 days paternity leave.
- ♦ Introduction of free pre-school place for every child for one year before they attend primary school.

Rationale

The increasing costs of childcare in urban and rural areas are placing an unsustainable burden on families and particularly women. Childcare costs have increased from mid 2008 by on average 20%, with a full time childcare place in Dublin now costing up to €2,200 per month and afterschool care in many childcare facilities are the same cost as a full time place. Ireland stands alone in Europe in the absence of a clear policy of public subsidisation of childcare for all parents. The NWCI has recommended the development of a publicly subsidised model of Early Childhood Care and Education in its publication 'An Accessible Childcare Model' (NWCI 2005) which would be introduced incrementally over a 15-year time frame. The model is child centred and prioritises the development of a quality and affordable childcare infrastructure for all children.

The current Government initiative to introduce a Childcare Subvention for Community Childcare providers will reduce the childcare support for parents and particularly women attempting to move from welfare to work. While the NWCI supports a policy of subsidisation and the targeting of disadvantage, the new Scheme will negatively women moving from welfare into employment and women who wish to move from working part-time into full-time employment. In the absence of a national programme for subsidising the childcare costs of all parents the scheme will create new poverty traps for women and clearly contradict government policy in the National Women's Strategy, and in National Action Plan for Social Inclusion and Social Protection. It is the NWCI's view that the scheme should be replaced with a national subsidisation scheme to reduce the costs to all parents and provide a higher level of subsidisation for those on social welfare and low incomes. Such a policy would be similar to those in place in many EU countries e.g. Denmark.

For Budget 2009 the NWCI are also prioritising the introduction of paid paternity and parental leave so that parents can choose to be at home with their child for the first year of their child's life. The benefits to children for being with their parents in their first year of life are widely recognised by research on childcare, (OECD 2004, NESF 2005).

WOMEN IN DECISION MAKING

Recommendations

- ♦ Allocate €2 million for the establishment of a public awareness campaign to promote the participation of women in the local and European Elections 2009
- ♦ Ring fence €2 million to support the participation of women in decision making within new local structures emerging as a result of the cohesion process.

Rationale

2009 is an important year for the development of the Irish democracy, with the European and Local elections taking place. Given the fact that women make up only 19% of

¹³ World Health Organisation Gender Policy; 1999.

¹⁴ 'Migration Nation' – statement on integration strategy and diversity management – Office of the Minister for Integration 2008.

local political representatives in Ireland and that successive Governments have failed to make a significant impact with regard to women's political participation, Budget 2009 must illustrate this Government's commitment to changing this situation.

In February 2003 Minister O'Cuiv announced of a review of community and local development structures to bring greater cohesion across local and community development programmes. Following extensive consultation and consideration by the Department a process was initiated to rationalise local development structures, specifically area-based partnerships, community partnerships and Leader companies. The conclusion of this Cohesion process and the introduction of new streamlined structures were announced by Minister O'Cuiv in August of 2007. The setting up of these unified structures on a county basis will result in changes in the structures and processes through which local community groups working against poverty and disadvantage develop, implement and advance their objectives. Ensuring the meaningful participation of women and in particular women from marginalised communities within these structures will require specific support, targeting and funding.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Recommendations

- ◆ That the €4.5 million allocated in the 2006 budget for Helplines, Rape Crisis Centres, Refuges and other relevant support services continues to be ring-fenced and spent on the much needed services for 2008/09.
- ◆ That the €2.4 million allocated for the implementation of the National Report on Sexual Assault Units be delivered fully.
- ◆ Agree a target of at least 1 refuge place (defined as number of rooms providing bed spaces for a woman and her children) per 10,000 of population and set a time-frame for achievement.
- ◆ Develop High Dependency Units for women who experience domestic violence and have alcohol and drug dependencies.

- ◆ Provide funding for language services to enable Domestic Violence services to work with migrant women; and funding to support training in Domestic Violence services.
- ◆ Introduce the right to remain in Ireland for dependant spouses of migrant workers where there is evidence of domestic violence.
- ◆ Ensure funding for supports for women who have been trafficked into Ireland for sexual or labour exploitation and ensure security against being deported.

Rationale

The past thirty years has seen the introduction of a wide range of legislation and enforcement procedures in relation to rape, sexual assault and domestic violence. Nevertheless, violence against women remains a significant problem in Irish society. Research has shown that 15% of women experience severe domestic abuse¹⁵ and that 20.4% of adult women have experienced sexual violence¹⁶. Despite yearly increased running costs, funding for these services was not increased between 2002 and 2007. There was an under spend in the allocated €4.5 million to RCCs and Refuges for 2007 and it is imperative that the €4.5 million which has been ring fenced stays ring fenced and is spent in 2008. There was €2.4 million allocated to the development of the SATU services and the implementation of the report; and there was an under spend in 2007 in this area also.

15 National Crime Council and ESRI, *Domestic Abuse of Women and Men in Ireland: Report on the National Study on Domestic Abuse*, Dublin, 2005.

16 McGee et al, *The Savi Report: Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland; A National Study of Irish Experiences, Beliefs and Attitudes Concerning Sexual Violence*, Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, 2002.